

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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## STATE OF MONTANA

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[www.dphhs.mt.gov](http://www.dphhs.mt.gov)

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Dear Mental Health Provider:

The role of a Mental Health Professional Person brings with it the responsibility of participating in a decision that involves the possible removal of an individual's personal freedom. As the State Mental Health Authority, we take this role seriously and are careful to document the legal qualifications of a mental health professional to evaluate an individual for commitment, and to testify in a court of law.

The certification of Mental Health Professional Persons is an important part of the backbone of our mental health crisis response system in Montana. The certification process has been carefully crafted through Montana Statute and Administrative Rule to be as efficient and timely as possible, and to ensure that those mental health professionals performing Professional Person duties are qualified to do so.

Over time the certification process has developed barriers and delays. The Mental Health Services Bureau is working hard to close gaps and streamline the certification and recertification processes. Our improvement efforts would not be complete without the involvement of our providers and potential applicants. I have outlined some suggestions that can go a long way to improving this process and reducing frustration for all involved.

1. When a provider hires a new mental health professional with the stipulation that they must become a certified Professional Person, it is important to know whether their education, credentials, and experience qualify them to be certified. These qualification criteria are designated in the Professional Person link on the DPHHS website, as well as in A.R.M. 37.91.101-601. If there is any doubt, please contact our office at 406-444-3964. Application for Professional Person in these cases should be initiated immediately as part of new employee paperwork.
2. Original college transcripts from an applicant's graduate college are required to be sent directly from the institution to the Mental Health Services Bureau and should be ordered as soon as possible.
3. There are four parts in the application packet.
  - Part I is applicant information, including home and work address, college names and degrees, and a letter of application.
  - Part II is employment information.

- Part III is a reference form to be completed by a colleague who has worked with the applicant long enough to be familiar with the quality of his or her work, experience in the mental health field, and personal character. There are three references required. Despite the best intentions of referents, a referral form is often lost on someone's desk and not sent in (it must be mailed from the referent).
  - Part IV is an endorsement from a current certified Professional Person who is familiar enough with the applicant to feel confident in recommending him or her for certification.
4. No action can be taken on an application packet until it is complete. It is essential that an applicant contact Carol Davidson (444-7209) or me (444-4927) to ensure that all four parts of the application packet and college transcripts have been received.
  5. Once an application packet is complete it will be reviewed by the Certification Committee during a meeting that occurs usually once a month, and at least every two months. When necessary, we have held impromptu meetings to expedite an application. This is time consuming and should be avoided when possible.
  6. It is important to submit an application that is as complete as possible. The Committee will be reviewing the types of populations an applicant has worked with (adults, children, those with SDMI or SED); what length of time they have served in various mental health positions; where applicable, what mental health coursework was included in their college coursework; quality of references and what credentials they have. This review process follows Montana Rule and Statute, and is intended to document for legal purposes that an applicant meets the standards to serve in the role of a Professional Person.
  7. The Committee may
    - a. determine an applicant fully qualifies to sit for the exam,
    - b. request additional information (e.g., the nature of a graduate internship)
    - c. hold a decision in abeyance pending additional months of experienceor
    - d. vote to deny eligibility.

Option "d" has seldom, if ever, been chosen and need not be if an applicant begins the certification process confident in his or her eligibility.
  8. When an individual has been approved by the Committee to sit for the exam, a letter will be sent to them that includes study materials, and contact information for their local job service where they will take the exam. The majority of the open-book exam is based on relevant Montana Statute and Administrative Rule. Many applicants assume that because it is open-book there is little or no need to familiarize themselves with the information ahead of time. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is a lot of material and applicants need to be able to locate various topics quickly, whether they are in rule or statute. If they should fail to pass the exam they will be asked to request a second endorsement, preferably from the same Mental Health Professional Person who originally endorsed them. They will then have an opportunity to take a second exam.

9. A certificate is issued to successful candidates and will include the certification number assigned to them, and the date on which the certification expires. A certificate span is three years in length. Professional Persons are expected to anticipate the end date in time to submit renewal information to the Department for re-certification. This information includes a list of continuing education, training, or instruction relevant to the exercise of Professional Person privileges and duties during the current three-year certification period, and current employment information. Our office will also send out reminders to people. *It is extremely important to contact us when a Professional Person's place of employment or home address changes.* A large number of reminders are returned to us with no forwarding address.

In conclusion, our Mental Health Professional Persons are a vital part of our crisis services system. Thus, the certification process is a high priority. Please distribute this information to crisis team leaders, potential candidates, and agency staff who are responsible for ensuring the availability of Professional Persons for their area.

Professional Person documents, including detailed instructions on completing the application can be found on our website at:

<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/>

- ➔ Programs and Services
- ➔ Mental Health
- ➔ Adult Mental Health
- ➔ Adult Mental Health Services
- ➔ Mental Health Professional Person Information

If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to contact me at 406-444-4927 or [brenner@mt.gov](mailto:brenner@mt.gov).

Sincerely,  
Bobbi J. Renner, Ph.D., Chair  
Professional Person Certification Committee